

Government Down Under

Purpose

Students will compare the parliamentary democracies of Australia and New Zealand with government in the United States in terms of distribution of powers, limited government, the rule of law, and individual rights.

Materials

For each group of students: paper, pencil

Activity

A. Pre-Activity Preparation

1. Tell students that Australia and New Zealand were once colonies of Britain. Explain that after both countries were granted independence both countries quickly established governments that resembled European democracies.
2. Tell students that both countries also borrowed some democratic ideas from the United States and other democratic governments, including a national constitution. Ask students: "Does this make their government limited or unlimited?"
3. Tell students that in these countries the power of the government lies in the parliament, as dictated by the constitution, and that the parliament is divided into the Senate and the House of Representatives. Ask: "Which branch of our government did they borrow this idea from?"
4. Tell students that the majority party within the parliament appoints the prime minister and explain that this process would be equivalent to either one of our political parties choosing our president based on which party had the most members in Congress. Ask: "How do we choose our president in this country?"
5. Tell students that Australia and New Zealand have not only borrowed from other countries' democratic principles, but have contributed to them as well.
6. Explain that both countries were the first to introduce the secret ballot and to allow women the right to vote. Ask: "How does a secret ballot increase individual rights?"

Technology Literacy Standards

	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
1	X	X	X	X		X	X
2	X	X	X			X	
3	X		X			X	X
4		X				X	
5							
6				X		X	
7							
8						X	
9						X	
10							
11				X			
12							
13				X			
14							
15				X			
16							

☒ = This Technology Literacy Standard is addressed in this lesson.

☐ = This Technology Literacy Standard is not addressed in this lesson.






B. Distribution of Powers

1. Remind students that the United States has a series of checks and balances among the executive, judicial, and legislative branches of the government.
2. Tell students that the judicial branch as we know it does not exist in Australia or New Zealand, but that both countries have court systems. Explain that the court system does not play a vital role in interpreting laws, but helps to enforce the laws.
3. Tell students that they will be making a list of pros and cons concerning the role of a judicial branch in a government. Explain that they will determine whether or not a judicial branch is essential to the balance of powers.
4. Divide the class into two groups and explain that one group will list pros and the other group will list cons.
5. Tell students who are working on the pros to consider why it would be important to have a judicial branch in a government that wants to have a balance of power.
6. Tell students who are working on the cons to consider why a judicial branch may not be necessary, or may be harmful, and suggest alternatives to a judicial branch.
7. Have each group assign a recorder to write down suggestions.
8. Have each group present their list and discuss each item as a class.

Questions for Review

Basic Concepts and Processes

During the discussion of the pros and cons, ask:

-  How did the founders of our country feel about limited government?
-  How does our judicial branch contribute to our government?
-  Why might Australia and New Zealand have decided not to include a judicial branch?
-  How does a judicial branch protect individual rights?
-  How have Australia and New Zealand been able to protect individual rights without a judicial branch?